

WH- and yes/no questions

Name _____

Date _____

THE SHORT VERSION

Both kinds of question exist in ASL, and word order only gets you part of the way to either one. The eyebrows finish the job — furrowed for one, raised for the other — and they have to stay up or down for the whole question, not just for the sign at the end.

WH- QUESTIONS

Who, what, when, where, why, how — and the face that goes with them.

WHERE THE QUESTION SIGN GOES

- ◆ In ASL the WH-sign usually comes at the END of the sentence. Name the topic first, then ask what you want to know about it.

THE FACE

- ◆ Eyebrows furrow and the head tilts slightly forward.
- ◆ Hold both for the whole question, not only for the WH-sign at the end.

EXAMPLES

YOUR NAME WHAT? — What is your name?

SHE GO WHERE? — Where is she going?

YOUR TEACHER WHO? — Who is your teacher?

YES / NO QUESTIONS

The word order barely changes. The face does the work.

THE FACE

- ◆ Eyebrows raise, the eyes widen slightly, and the head leans forward.
- ◆ Hold it from the first sign to the last.

STRUCTURE

- ◆ The sentence keeps much the same structure as a statement. The non-manual markers are what turn it into a question, which is why dropping them leaves your audience unsure whether you asked anything at all.

EXAMPLES

YOU STUDENT YOU? – Are you a student?

SHE TEACHER SHE? – Is she a teacher?

YOU LIVE DETROIT YOU? – Do you live in Detroit?

A THIRD CASE

A WH-sign with raised brows is not a WH-question at all – it is a rhetorical question, and the signer answers it themselves. Same sign, opposite eyebrows, different job.

TELLING THEM APART

The head leans forward either way. The eyebrows are the real difference.

FEATURE	WH- QUESTION	YES / NO QUESTION
Eyebrows	Furrowed	Raised
Head	Tilts slightly forward	Leans forward
Eyes	Neutral	Widened slightly
Question sign	At the end of the sentence	None needed
Answer wanted	Information	Yes or no

ACTIVITIES

Seven ways to drill both kinds of question.

PARTNER PRACTICE

PARTNER WORK

- ◆ Students take turns asking each other WH and yes/no questions, and answering in ASL.

QUESTION DICE

GAME

- ◆ Make a die with a WH-word on each face. Students roll and ask a question using whichever word comes up.

FLASHCARD MATCH

GAME

- ◆ Students match each WH or yes/no question with the response that fits it.

RECORD AND REFLECT

ASSESSMENT

- ◆ Students record themselves signing five WH questions and five yes/no questions with the right facial expressions, then watch their own video back.

CHARADES

GAME

- ◆ One student acts out an answer. The others ask WH or yes/no questions to work out what it is.

SENTENCE FIX

GRAMMAR FOCUS

- ◆ Give students English sentences and have them correct each one into proper ASL WH or yes/no form.

BRAINSTORM BOARD

WHOLE CLASS

- ◆ On the board, list as many WH and yes/no questions as the class can generate about one topic – school, food, weekend plans.

REMEMBER

Word order gets you most of the way; the eyebrows finish the job. A WH-question signed with raised brows reads as rhetorical, and a yes/no question with no marker at all reads as a statement. Whichever you are signing, hold the expression from the first sign to the last.